

AN EXTRAORDINARY CANOE RACE FROM ASTORIA IN 1811

That there should have been a quasi-international canoe race from Astoria to the Cascades almost immediately after Astoria had been established is surprising, but that much more than a century should have passed without it being known is even more surprising. The accounts written by the two chief contestants give the details, but since neither mentioned that there was any race it is not surprising that it only became known by an endeavor to reconcile what seemed to be glaring discrepancies in the two accounts.

There are six different accounts¹ of the arrival of David Thompson at Astoria, and of his return up the Columbia in company with David Stuart. The perfectly natural supposition is that they all went together. But this is where the many discrepancies occur. By piecing together the two detailed accounts of the fact of the race has come to light.

Thompson, a partner of the North-West Company, had his crew of French Canadians and Indians,² and was in his own canoe. David Stuart, partner of the Pacific Fur Company was accompanied by ten persons. Four clerks, Ross, Pillet, McLennan, and Montigny. Two unnamed French Canadians and two Hawaiians, one of whom was John Coxe who subsequently exchanged for Michael Boulard³ of Thompson's party. There were also the two Indian women, one of whom was masquerading as a man.

The first discrepancy in the accounts is the number of canoes since some mention two and some three. Possibly there were but two full sized canoes, and a small canoe belonging to the two Indian women. Since the "prophetess" Ko-come-ne-pe-ca⁴ knew that she would probably be attacked at the Cascades it is quite probable that she desired to travel in one of the large canoes where she

1 Gabriel Franchere, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America*, 1854, p. 122; Thwaites' edition, p. 254. Washington Irving, *Astoria*, Chapter 10; Hudson edition, p. 144. Ross Cox, *Adventures on the Columbia River*, 1831, Vol. I, p. 85. Alexander Ross, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River*, 1849, pp. 102-108, Thwaites' edition, pp. 115-121. "Journal of David Thompson, annotated by T. C. Elliott, *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XV, June, 1914, pages 105-111. David Thompson, *Narrative*, Champlain Society, Toronto, pp. 512-3.

2 David Thompson had with him Michael Boulard, who had been with him when he established Kootenae House, 1807; *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XXVI, March, 1925 p. 35, and was exchanged near the Cascades on this trip for a Hawaiian with Stuart, who was named John Coxe. Ross, as above, pp. 114, 199-200, Thwaites' edition, pp. 125, 199-200. For the interesting biography of this Hawaiian, 38th Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society, 1929, p. 20. Joe Cote and Pierre Pariel, who had been with Thompson in his terrible journey across Athabasca pass, 1810-11. Elliott Coues, *Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry*, 1897, pp. 667-669. Michael Beaurdeau and Francois Gregoire, who had been with Coaster, or Courteur, at a post on Clark's Fork in 1809. Coues, as above, p. 674, and two Iroquois, Charles and Ignace. He also had two Indian interpreters.

3 For Boulard and Coxe see note 2.

4 For the "Prophetess" Ko-come-ne-pe-ca, see *Washington Historical Quarterly*, XX, July, 1929, p. 201; XXI, April, 1930, p. 120.

would be protected by the white men. It would not have been difficult for some arrangement to be made whereby those two women, accustomed to paddling, would be preferred to the clerks who might have resented the thought of acting in the capacity of mere voyageurs.

Stuart undoubtedly had one of the large canoes,⁵ apparently with three of the men, and Pillet, the clerk, may have been in charge of the other with one man and the two women. Ross mentions two clerks with his canoe, one of whom must have been McLennan. Montigny may have been the other, since these three appear to have been friends and subsequently joined the North-West Company.⁶

Apparently a youthful desire to show their superiority led them to start at eleven o'clock, while the others with David Thompson did not leave until 1:24 p.m., for Thompson was accurate to the minute in recording the time.

Ross tells how he ran aground on the shoals near Cathlamet Point, and passed Puget Island and the Indian village on Oak Point, which he calls Whill Wetz, possibly the Indian pronunciation of Winship, who had attempted to establish a post there. Those youths appear to have reached Green Point that night, and were many miles in advance of Thompson, who had been compelled to delay on account of Stuart being unable to sail around Tongue Point. From there they had crossed to Harrington Point, and passed a very uncomfortable night in the rocky shores between Harrington Point and Skamokawa.⁷

The second day Ross and his friends made a good run and put up near the present site of St. Helens, Oregon, at the village of the noted Chief Ki-er-sin-no.⁸ The third day they reached Wasough-ally, the earliest mention of Washougal, opposite the mouth of "Quicksand River," now called Sandy. They had made good time, and were far ahead of Thompson, who had only reached Green Point at the end of the second day, where Ross had camped the first night. Thompson camped near the village of Ki-ersin-no the third night, and opposite the main mouth of the Willamette the fourth night. He called that river Wilarbet. The fifth night he

⁵ Thompson on July 28th took Stuart's [two] canoes up the Cascades, and on July 29th, "Went and fetched a light canoe of Mr. Stuart's." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XV, June, 1914, p. 112.

⁶ For McLennan joining the North-West Company, Cox, as above, I, 208. Ross joined January 8, 1814; Coues, as above, 790. Montigny, Franchere, as above, 278; Thwaites' edition, p. 345.

⁷ The camping places mentioned may be found by Ross' account and the detailed courses in Thompson's journal.

⁸ The spelling of the name of this noted chief is Kyeassino, Keassino, Kiersinno, Keyassno, Kassenow, Kersinous, Cazenove, Casenove, Carsino, Casanov and Casseneau.

camped at Washougal, having taken five days to go as far as Ross had gone in three.

The fact that Stuart's two canoes were loaded with thirty-six packages,⁹ each weighing about ninety pounds, will account for the apparent slowness. Although the accounts do not mention it, it is possible that some of Thompson's men were in Stuart's canoes, or they could hardly have made as good time as they did.

Ross was full two days ahead at Washougal, and those youths probably chuckled in glee at the progress they had made, although since their canoe had a sail and but little cargo it is easily explained. But from Washougal to the Cascades they found the conditions of navigating very different than the smooth sailing they had enjoyed. It is really surprising that they even reached the Cascades in three more days. Ross recorded that "The current assumed double force, so that our paddles proved almost ineffectual; and to get on, we were obliged to drag ourselves along from point to point, by laying hold of bushes and the branches of overhanging trees, which, although they impeded our progress in one way, aided us in another."

It took them three arduous days to reach the present site of Bonneville, Oregon where they camped and named the cliff above them Inshoach Castle. That same night Thompson and Stuart camped across the river, having made the journey from Washougal in one day, which shows that their skill in a strong current was infinitely superior to that of the impetuous youths.

It was a good race, however, and gives a little insight into a minor episode of the Astorians.

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⁹ Ross mentions about 35 packages in the canoes, on July 22nd, and says they paid at the Cascades 10 buttons for each package, amounting to 360 buttons, pp. 102, 115, Thwaites' edition, pp. 115, 126-7.